

Teaching Your Dog “Come to Side” Part One

One of the basic foundations skills each agility dog MUST learn is to **come to side**. When I say **come to side** I mean a very exact position of parallel to your side facing the same way you are. Your dog’s nose must be facing straight ahead and to make it easier for the dog to understand. Obedience students would call it “heel” position on both sides.

I feed the dog with my hand on the outside of the muzzle. The dog must not be wrapped around your leg in a position that my obedience instructor would call “forging” or behind your leg in a “lagging” position. **Come to side** is taught for both the right and left side of the body.

When you dog learns and therefore understands **come to side**, they should not cross in front of you or behind you (which usually results in an off course event or worse, them tripping you). They should run a path that is parallel to your path. This behavior reflects the way dogs hunt and is a natural and mostly innate skill. We usually warp this behavior by insisting on feeding them face-to-face. One of the best ways to undo this is to begin now to ALWAYS feed your dog their treat in **side** position.

To teach **come to side** in your back yard or at the agility field all you need is some small tasty treats, and a clicker or marker word. Place the dog on your left side tell them to wait or stay, and taking one step ahead of them stop and call them to “come” (drop your shoulder), when they get into side position, click and give them the treat. When you say “come” your hand is by your side and you feed them with your left hand on the outside of the muzzle. (Therefore their face is turned slightly away from you). Do the same on the right side using the right hand.

As you repeat this a few times you will find you can take more and more steps away from your dog. This will strengthen your “wait” or “stay” command.

As your dog gets proficient coming from behind you (6’o’clock), add the positions of 5,7,4,8,3, and 9 o’clock. Start close (one to two steps) and increase distance as they become more skilled.

Now, you are going back to 6 o’clock position and do a moving **side** position. Do as you did above but as they **come to side** position you will be moving and the treat will be delivered while walking. A little hard to do with small dogs but can be done! Just make sure to say your marker word quickly when they are in side position and give the treat fast!

When the dog understands the moving **side** position from 6’oclock now you can add the 3-9 o’clock moving **side** positions.

Now you are well on your way to getting your dog to **come to side** but next week we shall add more!